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SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH MEETS WITH EGYPT'S STATE SECURITY DIRECTOR

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

1.(SBU) Summary: On November 24, Human Rights Watch's (HRW) Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa, Joe Stork, met with General Hassan Abdel Rahman, Director General of Egypt's State Security Investigative Service (SSIS), facilitated by the Ambassador. After the meeting, Stork told us that while he did not think he made substantive progress, he was pleased that lines of communication had been opened between SSIS and HRW and looked forward to future contacts. Separately, on November 28, we met with Colonel Hisham Abdel Hamid, SSIS' Human Rights liaison, who also attended the meeting with Stork. Abdel Hamid expressed similar views on the meeting; he added that he had fully answered all of HRW's questions. End summary.

2.(SBU) Stork visited Cairo in late November to unveil HRW's recent report on GoE "interference with religious freedom." In a meeting with the Ambassador, Stork lamented his inability to discuss the report, and human rights issues generally, with officials from SSIS, the agency responsible for monitoring opposition politicians, journalists and activists. Instead, Stork said he was limited to speaking with officials from Egypt's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who have limited substantive knowledge on human rights issues. The Ambassador offered to assist Stork in arranging a meeting with the SSIS Director General.

3.(SBU) Stork told us that Abdel Rahman opened the ninety minute meeting by asking that the discussion be "informal" and "off the record." Substantively, Stork characterized Abdel Rahman's position as "we (SSIS) don't do bad things." Abdel Rahman said that he commands over 40,000 police officers and told Stork he could count on one hand the number who had committed abuses. Abdel Rahman objected to Stork's use of the word torture, saying it implied something "systemic" and said Egypt's security services were "badly maligned." Stork asked about the monitoring and harassment of NGOs, which Abdel Rahman said was necessary because such organizations are run by "anarchists" and people with prior arrests who need "monitoring."

4.(SBU) Stork said he made no substantive progress. Nonetheless, he found it significant that HRW now has a line of communication with SSIS. Abdel Rahman named one of his deputies, Colonel Hisham Abdel Hamid, SSIS' human rights liaison, as HRW's point of contact, and HRW intends to meet with Abdel Hamid on subsequent visits.

5.(SBU) On November 28, we met with Abdel Hamid, who gave a similar, but more positive, account of the meeting. He said Abdel Rahman described to Stork SSIS' role in protecting human rights, including participating in the Ministry of Interior's Human Right's Committee, conducting human rights

training programs for police officers (including in conjunction with the UNDP), identifying and rewarding "best human rights practices," monitoring officers interactions with citizens, and disciplining officers who commit human rights violations. On Stork's questions about torture, Abdel Rahman said torture was not an SSIS policy, but the organization was besmirched by "media exaggerations". Abdel Hamid said that although it was a Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) responsibility, he would meet with HRW in the future. (Note: Abdel Hamid also noted that the MFA is responsible for and should be the primary liaison with diplomatic missions on human rights issues, but said the U.S. Embassy was the exception and he would welcome more contact with us. End note.)

6.(SBU) Comment: Abdel Hamid said that he had met about a year ago with Amnesty International, but in general, he and SSIS had limited dealings with human rights organizations, and dealt with them through the MFA. We share Stork's view that although there were no substantive developments as a result of the contact, it is a significant development that SSIS appears willing to engage directly with an international human rights organization.

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